

**The State Bar of California
Council on Access & Fairness
(415) 538-2143**

September 2008

Tips on Completing Your Application for A Superior Court Appointment

If you have seriously considered becoming a trial court judge, you may feel a little intimidated by the prospect of completing the judicial application, especially now that you must submit it online and complete the final online version all in one sitting. You will be required to disclose detailed personal and private information, but the application itself is really quite simple. It can be easily completed if you work on the draft of the application incrementally, with a clear organizational plan in mind. We list below some things to consider before you begin your journey, and, on the next page, we suggest a plan of action for tackling the draft of your application. Good luck!

• **Know What You Are Getting Yourself Into.** Select a sitting or retired judge to mentor you through the application process --you will need a cheering section. Then do the following:

1. Go to the Governor's website at <http://www.gov.ca.gov/appointments/judicial>.
2. Print out all of the instructions for completing the application, and pay particular attention to the section on completing the Superior Court Judicial Application. DO NOT click on the link for "Superior Court Application" at the end of the instructions section. You will not go to that link until the very end of the process.
3. Download the application here http://www.gov.ca.gov/pdf/gov/Judicial_application_Worksheet.pdf and save it as a Word document.¹ This will serve as your working draft. You will be able to cut and paste into the final on-line version of your application certain portions of your working draft (e.g., your significant cases, your essays, etc.). This will save you time when you complete your application on-line.
4. Read the application straight through to familiarize yourself with the types of information you will have to provide, and make notes regarding the sources from which you can obtain the requested information.

• **Know What You Have To Go Through.** It would be a good idea at this juncture to review the rules of procedure governing the State Bar's Commission on Judicial

¹ To save the application as a Word document so you can create your working draft and revise it as needed before you submit it to your reviewers, do the following when the application appears on the screen:

1. Click on "edit" and "select all", then
2. Click "edit" and select "copy", then
3. Open a new Word document in your word processing system,
4. Click "edit" and select "paste" (or use the clipboard icon to paste")

You should now have the full text of the entire application. Reformat the lines so that you have an easily readable document, add several returns after individual questions 19 through 70 so you will have sufficient room to provide the requested information, and then save the document as your judicial application.

Nominees Evaluation ("JNE Commission"). Go to http://calbar.ca.gov/state/calbar/calbar_generic.jsp?cid=10111&id=13721. You must undergo a formal evaluation by the JNE Commission before the governor can appoint you, so you may as well learn now what to expect during that aspect of the appointments process. Your supporters as well as persons who may be less than enthusiastic about your aspirations will get a JNE Commission evaluation form and will be able to weigh in on whether you should be appointed. During the JNE commission evaluation process, you will be apprised of any negative comments received about you and will be given an opportunity to respond to those criticisms. Before you get to the formal JNE Commission stage, however, you will have undergone a "secret" evaluation. The governor's Judicial Appointments Secretary consults with a private screening committee, the Judicial Selection Advisory Committee ("JSAC"), the membership of which is not currently made public. Members of the local JSAC will review your application, consult with judges and lawyers and others of their personal contacts in your community, and make a recommendation on whether your name should even be submitted to the JNE Commission. You will not be apprised of either the substance or the source of the information received by the JSAC, and you will not be given an opportunity to rebut any negative assessments of your candidacy. In addition to being vetted by the local JSAC and the JNE Commission, you will likely also undergo an evaluation by your county bar association. The information gathered about you will be made known to the governor's office.

- **Know Yourself.** While at the state bar Website, check your own state bar record for accuracy. You must disclose in your application any complaints against you and any record of discipline, including any sanctions in excess of \$1,000. This is also a good time to reflect upon whether there is anything in your personal or professional background that would detract from your suitability as a judge.

- **Know Your Level of Commitment To The Ultimate Goal.** If after reading the application you still wish to become a judge, we recommend that you schedule three sessions with yourself, during which you devote time to answering the questions in the order that we suggest on the following page. The time intervals between each session can be as long or as short as you choose, but you should give your application priority. Completing the draft application is more of a marathon than a sprint, so keep moving.

- **Know the Consequences of Inattentiveness.** Keep in mind that this is probably the most important job application that you will ever complete. Typographical errors, grammatical errors, missing information, untruthful information, and general sloppiness will suggest that you will approach your judicial duties in the same careless and haphazard way. Before submitting your final application, make sure you let your mentor judge, and at least two very close - and very candid - friends review your final product. Finally, please again review the instructions from the governor's Website, and make sure you are ready to comply with all requirements, and that you know what you will have to mail in.

- **Get Ready to Go Online to Submit Your Final Application.** After you have completed your draft and incorporated all of the intended changes based on the suggestions from you mentors/advisors, and you consider your draft final, it will be time to submit it online. Allow yourself a few hours to complete this task, and remember that you cannot go in and out of the online version without having to start all over again.

- Open up your Word/Wordperfect document so it will be available when you get ready to cut and paste the text of your essays and other lengthy entries. Also, have a hard copy of your application available for reference as you enter information at the drop down menus online.

- Go to the governor's website and now go to the very end of the instructions section and click on the link "Superior Court Application." This will take you to the online version of the application.
- Carefully read and make sure you understand the instructions found at this link, and start to enter your information.
- After you submit your application on-line, you must still mail a hardcopy and attachments (e.g., writing samples, resume, etc) to the governor's office. Make sure you carefully read and follow the instructions for binding and mailing your application.

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COMPLETING THE TRIAL COURT APPLICATION IN THREE SESSIONS

SESSION ONE: ORDER OF QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

1-6. Your name, ethnicity, etc.	22. Prior judicial applications	56. Moral turpitude charges
7-13. Personal info, spouse, etc.	23. Candidate for judicial office	58. Bonded positions
14. Political party/dates	24. Military service	61. Unpaid judgments /orders
15. Your state legislators *	29. Able to perform judicial duties	62. Tax liens/collections
16. Bilingual abilities	33. List all trials, entire career	63. Current on tax returns
17. Educational background	39-40. Current/past judicial officer; 10 big cases handled	68. Opposition to your appointment
18-19. Current employer and nature of current employment	42. Officer/director of business	36. 10 big career cases—start †
20. Current specializations	45. Non-lawyer licenses & proof of good character	28. Essay- Why do you want to be a judge? – 1 st draft ✓

SESSION TWO: ORDER OF QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

21. Courts you can practice in	39-40. Current/past judicial officer, 10 big cases, more work	57. All licenses, suspensions, disciplines, charges
25. Work History/Supervisors	43. Income from other than law	59. Any suits by clients
26. Background-why qualified	44. Other public offices held	60. Malpractice claims
30. Specific areas of legal experience	53. Arrests/convictions/ investigations	64-66. Drug use; alcohol use; gambling
31-32. Variety of practice-past 5 years	54. Lawsuits / bankruptcies	70. List 5 Personal references – draft
38. Teaching experience- college, university, law school	55. Bar discipline/sanctions	36. 10 big career cases – more

SESSION THREE: ORDER OF QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

33. All trials, entire career, more	48-50 Bar assns, private clubs	28. Essay- Why? final draft ✓
34. Identify trials in last 5 yrs only	51. Pro bono legal services	70. References—final list;
35. Non-trial big cases in last 5 yrs †	52. Community service/affairs	Other things to do – attach writing samples, photo, resume
37. Your published cases	67. Bad press re character	
41. Pro tem/arbitrator work	69. Disclosures re negatives in your background	
46. Writings/publications	27. Essay-Role of attorney /judge in improving society	
47. Honors, awards, prizes	36. 10 big career cases – finish	

- * <http://www.assembly.ca.gov/> [click "Find My District"]
- † First, list the names only of 12-13 cases that might serve as your significant cases, and add any other information you can recall. Choose carefully! Each opposing counsel and judge listed in your application will be sent a JNE Commission evaluation form. To locate current addresses and phones of opposing or co-counsel or retired judges, click on "Attorney Search" at www.calbar.ca.gov. If you can't locate a retired judge, indicate that the judge is retired.
- ✓ Think seriously about why you want to be a judge. This essay will speak volumes about what kind of judge you will be. For your final essay, follow the "Goldilocks Rule" and make sure the essay is: Not too big/not too little/not too hot/not too cold/not too hard/not too soft – is should be just right!